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ΥΠΟΥΡΓΕΙΟ ΠΑΙΔΕΙΑΣ & ΘΡΗΣΚΕΥΜΑΤΩΝ
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TESTIMONIAL: MARIA KASMIRLI

I am writing this testimonial as Director (Headmistress) of the School of European Education in Heraklion, Crete, in which capacity I have been line manager and colleague to Ms Maria Kasmirli for two years.

Maria has worked in our school as a teacher since 2011, teaching the fifth grade class in the English-speaking section. She is a highly skilled and professional teacher who cares deeply for her students and is much loved by them.

In observing Maria's lessons I have been consistently impressed by her ability to create a stimulating and productive learning atmosphere in which all students, even the shyest, are motivated to participate. This is a particular challenge in our school, since many English-section students do not have English as a first language and are hesitant about speaking up in class. Yet Maria has always found a way to draw them in and help them to develop the confidence needed to participate fully and flourish as learners.

Maria is a flexible and creative teacher, who tailors her teaching to each individual student and uses a range of methods and materials in order to achieve this. Her lessons typically combine a mixture of formats, both teacher-led and student-led, and there are regular pauses for reflection and consolidation. She is a resourceful teacher and supplements the set course materials with a range of additional materials of her own, including specially written handouts, audio-visual materials, selected web resources, and so on. She likes to stretch students academically, especially in their reading (she

recently introduced her fifth graders to 'To Kill a Mockingbird' which they enjoyed very much). However, she never forces the pace and takes care to modify materials to suit her students' needs and abilities.

Maria is always ready to innovate in her methods and materials and to make use of new technology and new ideas, and she encourages her students to research, direct, and film their own video projects. A particularly impressive result was a project in which her fifth graders -- none of whom had English as a first language -- reinterpreted and performed scenes from Shakespeare's 'Merchant of Venice' in the light of the current economic crisis in Greece.

Maria plans her lessons well, but is never inflexible and is always ready to make adjustments in response to student needs and learning opportunities. Although she has heavy commitments outside school, including demanding caring responsibilities, she manages her time well and is always highly engaged with her work.

Maria's specialism is in philosophy and she believes passionately in introducing children to critical thinking skills at young age. Her ethics lessons are very popular, and, under her guidance, students display remarkable thoughtfulness and maturity in discussing challenging issues. I have known students from other classes ask for special permission to be allowed to join these sessions, and I know Maria plans to start a debating society in the school. I believe she also has plans to develop training materials for and parents and teachers who want to introduce philosophy to children.

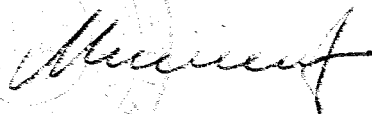
In her pastoral side of her duties, Maria has proven extremely able and conscientious. She cares deeply for the welfare of her students and handles their behavioural and emotional problems with sensitivity and skill. As an example, I would like to mention a recent case, in which a pupil was going through a difficult time, living with two abusive parents, one of whom would often come to school and speak to Maria in an aggressive manner. Maria's handling of the situation was impeccable. She helped to create a positive school atmosphere for the child, kept school management, social services, and other relevant bodies informed, and asked for help when appropriate. She didn't break any confidences, and she dealt with the parents in a careful, sensitive, and respectful way, usually managing to calm down the aggressive one. It is to Maria's great credit that the child completed the year successfully.

Maria continually reflects on her own practice and seeks ways to further her professional development. Training opportunities in Greece are limited at the moment, but Maria actively pursues them and takes up all she can. I know from meetings with her that she is particularly keen to update and enhance her skills in various areas, including science teaching. Maria also wishes to develop new skills, both in leadership and in special needs teaching (especially for children with autism). I hope she will have the opportunity to do this and recommend her strongly for inclusion on any programs in these areas.

As a colleague and collaborator, Maria is a pleasure to work with. She is enthusiastic, innovative, and well-organized, and has a 'can do' attitude, which inspires those around her. She is passionate about teaching and learning and always ready to take on new challenges and explore new opportunities. During her first year at the school she was the coordinator for the school's partnership in a proposal to the European 'Comenius' program, collaborating with colleagues from other schools across Europe to draw up an exciting project based on environmental ethics (her suggestion, I believe). She did so with energy, efficiency, and enthusiasm and I know that colleagues in the partnering schools were very impressed with her. Maria has also acted as Ethics Coordinator and Inclusion Officer for the school, developing policy and briefing colleagues on these important matters.

Maria is a rare and gifted person and a very talented teacher.

Sincerely yours,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Konstantina', written over a faint circular official stamp.

Ms Konstantina Batala
Headmistress